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Item 80 of the preliminary list*

CONVENTION ON THE PROHIBITION OF THE DEVELOPMENT, PRODUCTION AND STOCKPILING OF BACTERIOLOGICAL (BIOLOGICAL) AND TOXIN WEAPONS AND ON THEIR DESTRUCTION

Note verbale dated 28 April 1997 from the Permanent Mission of Cuba to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

The Permanent Mission of Cuba to the United Nations presents its compliments to the Secretary-General and, with regard to item 80 of the preliminary list, has the honour to convey hereby a report on the appearance in Cuba of the Thrips palmi plague (see annex).

In this respect, the Permanent Mission of Cuba to the United Nations, following instructions from its Government, kindly requests that the present letter and the attached report be circulated to all Member States as an official document of the General Assembly.

* A/52/50.

ANNEX

[Original: English, French and Spanish]

Information about the appearance in Cuba of the Thrips palmi plague

I. DESCRIPTION OF THE FACTS

1. On 21 October 1996, at 10.08 hours, crew members of scheduled flight CU-170 of Cubana de Aviación (Cuban Airlines), on board a Fokker-27 aircraft, flying the Havana-Las Tunas route, upon crossing the Girón air corridor in the western region of Cuba, noticed a single-engine airplane flying from north to south, at about 1,000 feet (300 metres) above them, apparently spraying or sprinkling unknown substances - some seven times - in an intermittent manner.

2. At that very moment, Cubana de Aviación Fokker aircraft was located 25 to 30 kilometres south of Varadero, in Matanzas Province, flying at an altitude of 9,000 feet and at a speed of 400 kilometres per hour.

3. According to scheduled flights, objective radar control and recordings of radio conversations between the airplanes and ground control when the development took place, the airplane flying over the Girón corridor from north to south in a course perpendicular to the Cubana de Aviación flight was a fumigation aircraft Model S2R, register N3093M, of the civilian aircraft registry of the United States of America, operated by the State Department of that country, as stated in the flight authorization requested to the Institute of Civil Aeronautics of Cuba, and in accordance with the United States public registry of civilian aircraft. The above-mentioned airplane had taken off from Patrick United States Air Force Base, in Cocoa Beach in the state of Florida, bound for Grand Cayman.

4. The Cubana pilot immediately reported to flight control on the release of unknown substances, in the form of a white or greyish mist, by the S2R airplane. The Cuban air controller established communication with the United States aircraft and asked whether it was having any technical problem, to which the pilot's answer was "No". He was also asked about the type of aircraft he was flying, answering that it was a single-engine AY-65. That conversation is recorded on tape.

5. On 18 December 1996, the first signs of the presence of a Thrips plague appeared in Matanzas Province, at potato plantations of the Diamand variety, sowed 38 days before on the "Lenin" State Horticultural Farm, in Jovellanos Municipality. Samples of these organisms were sent to the Central Quarantine Laboratory of the National Pest Control Centre.

6. On 26 December 1996, the Cuban Ministry of Foreign Affairs presented a note of complaint to the United States Interest Section in Havana regarding the incident that had occurred in the Girón corridor, urging the United States party to take appropriate measures aimed at the clarification of the event.

7. On 12 February 1997, the United States Interest Section in Havana handed over to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Cuba a reply to that note, stating that on the day of the incident, the United States pilot had, during his flight, seen a Cuban commercial airplane flying below, and as he was not certain of having been seen, "following caution and safety procedures, and with the purpose of securing a positive visual contact, the pilot used the 'smoke generator' of his aircraft, in order to indicate its location" adding that "the smoke vanished and no fluid was poured from the airplane".

8. On 14 February 1997, the Central Quarantine Laboratory confirmed that the insect examined was the Thrips palmi karay, exotic to Cuban territory until that moment.

9. The Thrips palmi is indigenous to Asia. Since 1985 it has scattered across certain Caribbean zones, including Haiti, the Dominican Republic and Jamaica. It is a polyphagous phytophagan that infects practically all crops, weeds and ornamental plants. It is reported to be a vector of viruses such as that known as TSWV. It is an insect of difficult diagnosis, unknown to the majority of Cuban specialists. It is self-propagated within a field, and into neighbouring ones, disseminating mostly when seedlings, fruits and vegetal material, including topsoils, are moved from one place to another. It also scatters by aerial means, particularly its larvae. It is resistant to temperature changes. Its reproductive cycle lasts between 15 and 21 days, depending on the host plant.

10. Taking into account the levels of highest density of the insect population, it could be ascertained that the primary source of the outbreak was located on the above-mentioned "Lenin" State Horticultural Farm. Smaller outbreaks were pinpointed in fields close to the villages of Máximo Gómez and Bolondrón, also in Matanzas Province, a few kilometres away from the main source.

11. In the first half of January 1997, outbreaks of the same insect were spotted in municipalities south of Havana Province, bordering Matanzas, affecting corn, beans, pumpkins, cucumbers and other crops.

12. Once the insect was identified, the Government of Cuba adopted a programme of emergency measures to fight it, including chemical control, through the purchase of pesticides, which, in spite of its high cost, have not achieved effective results.

13. At the end of March 1997, the Government of Cuba, complying with international regulations, informed the Secretary-General and the United Nations Centre for Disarmament, about the presence of Thrips palmi karay in its territory, and notified this finding to the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) to which Cuba applied for technical and financial assistance to fight the pest.

14. At present, Thrips palmi is spread virtually throughout Matanzas and La Habana Provinces, in two municipalities of Cienfuegos Province, in some municipalities of Pinar Del Rio Province and in the Island of Youth. Its presence has not been detected in the central and eastern provinces of the country.

II. RESULTS OF THE INVESTIGATIONS

15. The S2R aircraft, register N3093M, is used by the State Department of the United States in the struggle against drug trafficking, to destroy crops. The aircraft utilizes two sprinkling systems: one for the use of aerosols and liquid particles and another for dropping solid particles. No smoke generator is known to be installed aboard this aircraft.

16. The specialists appointed by the Cuban party to clarify the event considered unlikely a voluntary or involuntary leakage of fuel or oil, which is confirmed by the answer given by the United States airplane pilot himself to the Cuban air controller.

17. The argument used by the United States party in its note of reply regarding the smoke release, appears, from the technical point of view, weak and in contradiction with the conversation held during the flight. On the other hand it is not a standard procedure established for this kind of situation. The pilot of the Cuban Airline Fokker asserts on the basis of his visual observation and his previous experience as a pilot of fumigation airplanes, that the release made by the United States aircraft was not of smoke but of a substance.

18. Bearing in mind the place where the unknown substance was released, it can be established that the most risky area for infection is a zone covering 15 to 20 kilometres to the west and 20 to 25 kilometres to the east of the Girón air corridor, although the whole territory of Matanzas Province is considered a probable infected zone. These zones match those actually infected both by the primary and secondary outbreaks.

19. Considering the insect population found on 18 December 1996, at the main source of the outbreak, specialists of the Cuban National Pest Control Centre estimated the beginning of the plague to date back to three or four previous generations. Bearing in mind the reproductive cycle of this insect, the beginning of the infection can be ascertained as approximately 21 October 1996, which was precisely the date when the United States S2R aircraft flew over this point.

20. Mindful of the distribution of the agent in countries like Haiti, the Dominican Republic and Jamaica, it would be expected that any natural occurrence would be in the eastern region of Cuban territory, the closest to those countries. Its appearance more than 600 kilometres away from that region is, therefore, odd and suspicious.

21. Although at first sight it could be expected that the height of the flight of the S2R aircraft is not the most appropriate for the dissemination of biological agents, information is available regarding experiments made by North Americans themselves in which that type of agent was dropped from even higher altitudes. On the other hand, the enduring features of the insect, mainly in its larva state, make its survival possible at these altitudes.

22. Because of its nature of being a polyphagous phytophagan that strikes and severely damages practically every crop, and is also resistant to a considerable variety of pesticides, the Thrips palmi can be considered ideal biological

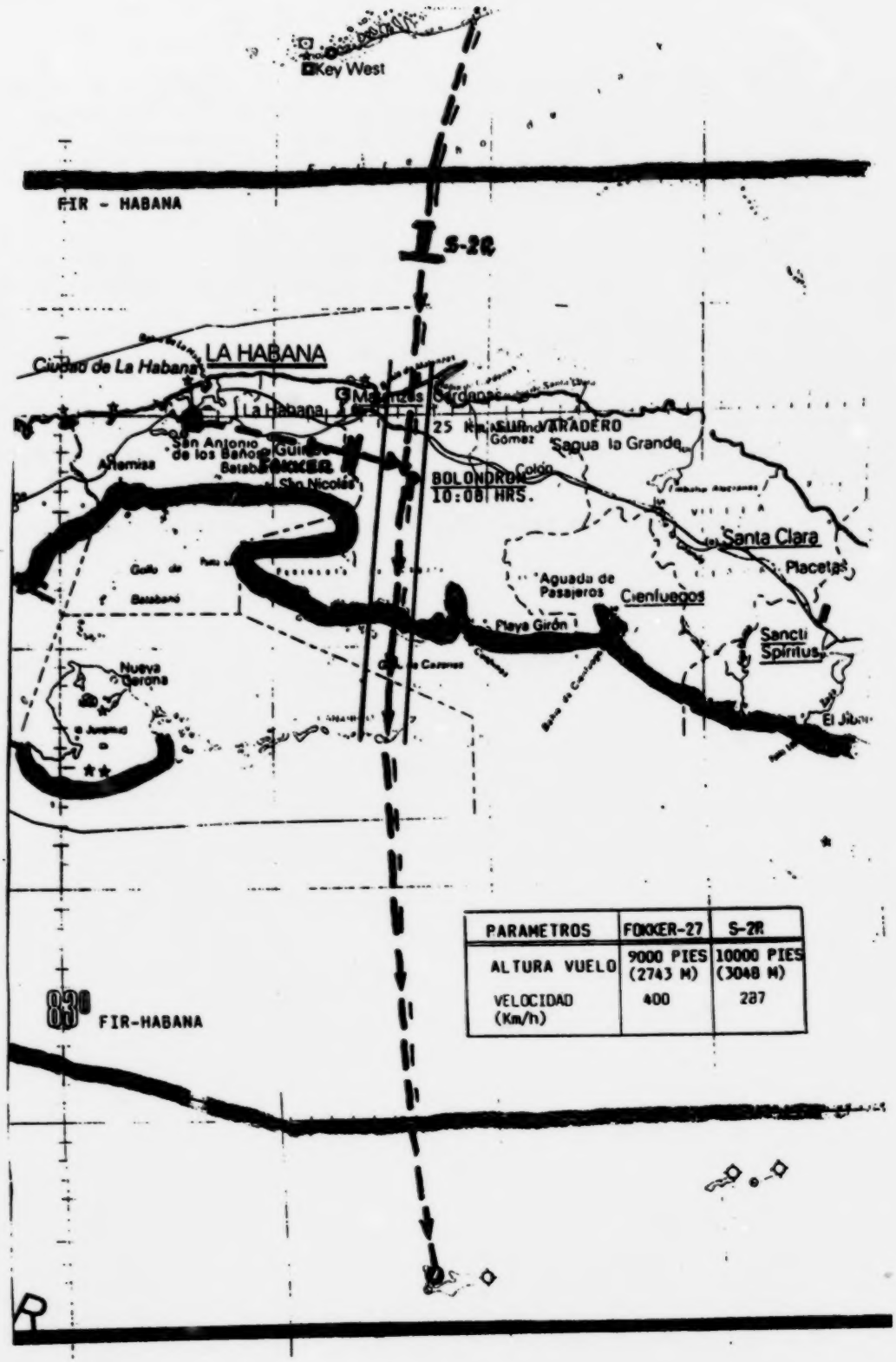
agents able to inflict heavy damage on agricultural food crops. In a document entitled "Report of the Subgroup for Investigation of Claims of Use or Escape of Agents Which Constitute Biological or Toxin Weapons", of 29 February 1996, prepared by the Federation of American Scientists, Thrips palmi are included among the invertebrata that could come within the purview of the Convention on Biological Weapons.

23. In this particular case, the behaviour of the plague in Cuba shows a polyphagia bigger than the one described in the scientific literature.

III. CONCLUSIONS

24. The analysis of the facts and the results of the investigations allow us to relate, with a high degree of accuracy, the appearance of Thrips palmi in Matanzas Province with the dropping, on 21 October 1996, of an unknown substance by an aircraft operated by the United States State Department.

25. There is reliable evidence that Cuba has once again been the target of biological aggression.


Key West
FIR - HABANA
S-28
LA HABANA
Ciudad de La Habana
La Habana
Matanzas
Cárdenas
25 Km. SUR
VARADERO
Gómez
Sagua la Grande
San Antonio de los Baños
Güines
Batabanó
FOKKER
Artemisa
San Nicolás
Colón
BOLONDRON
10:08 HRS.
Santa Clara
Placetas
Golfo de Batabanó
Aguada de Pasajeros
Cienfuegos
Playa Girón
Sancti Spíritus
Nueva Gerona
Canarreos
El Jíbaro
PARAMETROS | FOKKER-27 | S-28
ALTURA VUELO | 9000 PIES (2743 M) | 10000 PIES (3048 M)
VELOCIDAD (Km/h) | 400 | 287
FIR-HABANA